DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 337 815 CS 507 481

AUTHOR Gutenko, Gregory
TITLE Implementing the Study of Multicultural Aesthetics in Film and Video.
PUB DATE Jul 90
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the International Colloquium on Communication (12th, Lausanne, Switzerland, July 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Aesthetic Values; Course Descriptions; Cultural Context; *Cultural Differences; Film Production; *Film Study; Higher Education; *Multicultural Education
IDENTIFIERS Haskell Indian Junior College KS; Native Americans

ABSTRACT

Film and television in the western world are highly stylized and culturally specific products. A course on multicultural aesthetics in film and video should introduce the student to perceptual alternatives in film and television use. Some of these alternatives can be derived from three well-established areas of film/television study: the representational/reproductive cinema; non-European film and video; and experimental film and video. This proposed course design for multicultural aesthetics in film and video is highly influenced by the work of Sol Worth and John Adair (1966). Basic production courses are recommended prerequisites, since media production exercises are an essential part of the course design. A fundamental premise of this course is that for a Native American student, who might be attending the Haskell Indian Junior College in Lawrence, Kansas, the "Standard Average European" (SAE) media concept may be the alien concept, and somewhere in the non-SAE perspectives may be the appropriate "Standard Native American" concept. Production exercises on videotape should be carried out using consumer grade camera/recorder combinations to minimize devoting attention to technical operations and to allow emphasis on application. The course content of multicultural aesthetics in film and video should be fundamentally directed towards establishing contrasts between SAE and non-SAE rules of structure, content, and imaging. (A list of suggested reading materials and a list of films and videotapes to be shown in class are included; 21 references are attached.) (RS)

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IMPLEMENTING THE STUDY OF MULTICULTURAL ÆSTHETICS IN FILM AND VIDEO

GREGORY GUTENKO, University of Missouri

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Film and television in the western world are highly stylized and culturally specific products. Our structural approaches to these media are ethnocentrically assumed to be "correct", because we have been the principal developers and users of these technologies. The design and documentation of mass media tools and devices imply how they are expected to be used, and how the products of these tools are to be visualized and assembled.[1]

Existing production curricula in secondary and post-secondary institutions in the United States foster and maintain a culturally biased approach to these media, either by directing students into an unquestioning imitation of TV program formats (Robinson), or by consciously encouraging conformity to industry practises with ultimate career assimilation in mind (Hamilton). Even in elementary classrooms, when student creativity and imagination is being encouraged through play and experimentation with videotaping, the media acculturalization process is at work, as children learn the "proper" way to bound their reality within an image frame (Kaplan). By the time students reach the middle school levels, they have learned compliance with the shape of the media around them (Greene). In nonproduction courses that focus on critical and analytical skills, film and television are analyzed principally on the basis of messages, their persuasive intent and methods, psychological implications, and veracity (Lieberman). The structural bias and ethnocentrism of these media remain overlooked.

Certainly it is now recognized that all communications are "value-laden", and it can be expected that film and television content originating in America, Sweden, or Russia will be imbued with their respective values (Katz and Wedell 193). It is not so evident that all forms of communication are also structure-laden. Just as different languages function on the bases of their unique grammatical structures, so too does message-making in film and video rely on a particular "grammatical" organization of the medium's elements. The cultural origins of content and symbols in these media and the perceptual conventions derived from Renaissance representation are examples of structural rules. To them can be added the "grammar" of shot/scene editing, spatial and temporal displacement/expansion/ contraction, and other mannered and obvious techniques that can be defined as "style".

It is the structure of a language that determines the realms of conceptualization that can be defined and conveyed. That is what determines a language's capacity, or lack of capacity, to

distinguish and convey experience and value. The revolutionary power of satellite broadcasted television lies in its pervasive and instantaneous delivery of particularly structured images and sound. The frequently overlooked inadequacy of television lies in its extremely limited capacity to define experiences and values other than the superficial conventions of consumerism, competition, and entertainment. It is this structural inadequacy that is likely to leave the complex realities of the world's diverse cultures and perspectives beyond the grasp of even a sympathetic transposition into the television medium.[2]

Perceiving the structural influences of culture on mass media form is not necessarily easy to do. Not only do the beliefs, logics, and myths of a culture constrain perception, but the autonomic interpretation of sensory inputs is also an intervening variable. Anthropologists have found that different cultural world views are mediated by cognitive maps that have in turn been influenced by different perceptions of reality (Kearney 45). The experience of what "time" itself is varies between cultures, depending on its perception as being linear, as in an industrially based society, or oscillating, as in an ecologically based society (99). Different concepts of time will affect the perception of rate and depth (102), and the significance of the immediate moment as opposed to the past or future (101). Cross-cultural differences in the concept of time accounts for structural uniqueness in calendars (141) and theatrical productions (144). The concept of space, and of the human orientation within space, is also culturally relative (161). These differences in world views are rooted in the sensory processes, "for the senses are the portal through which the brain receives information about external reality."(42).

Culture and cognition, then, are interdependent with the senses. As Wober observes, different styles of communication are related to different modes of sensory elaboration (127), just as McLuhan recognized different styles of communication are related to different communication technologies. Members of different cultures are defined by Wober as *sensotypes*, by which is meant a cultural group with a specific pattern of relative importance of the difference senses (120). The *sensotype* description defines both the balance and the acuity of the senses. Berry has described relationships between visual discrimination and artistic design and execution in subsistence level cultures (130), and Doob has found that there are both race and rural environment variables that account for differences in the recall and persistence of eidetic images (after-images) (199).

With fundamental perceptions of time, space, and images being often highly disparate between cultures, the ethnocentrism of film and television becomes narrow and one dimensional. Not only can the conventions of film and television "language", its coding of space and time, appear incomprehensible or awkward to those unsocialized in its grammar, its limited "vocabulary" and rules are unable to convey the perceptions of other sensotypes--not their images, dreams, or their privileged understandings of reality. To expand the capacity of film and television to communicate by freeing these media to alternative human experiences is the objective of this proposed area of investigation and study.

A Course in Multicultural Æsthetics in Film and Video

A course in multicultural æsthetics in film and video should introduce the student to perceptual alternatives in film and television use. Some of these alternatives can be derived from three well-established areas of film/television study. While these areas of study obviously have been developed within the very cultural empire from which this course is seeking escape, these areas can still form a well documented base from which to launch an investigation of alternative media æsthetics.

The first area of media study would be the European theoretical tradition of Representational/ Reproductive cinema. The second would be the cinema of Non-European film makers, in particular the Japanese. The third would be the experimental film and video work of European and U.S. artists incorporating perceptual viewpoints derived from other cultures, surrealism, dreams, and visions. That these such perceptual/structural alternatives in film and television may be relevant to the perceptual and cognitive styles of students from other cultures is suggested by material that follows.

Minor adaptations in course content and activities would permit relating visual media to specific cultural attributes and conventions. For Native American students, such as those at the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas,[3] the value of this course can be summarized as follows: (a) The validation of a unique Native American orientation to the use of film and video as communications media. This can promote an individual's personal quest for expression as an artist through the integration of cultural world view and a supportive non-distorting adaptation of media. This can also promote group efforts in the design and production of instructional, informational, and cultural film and video programming in harmony with the perceptual and cognitive styles of Native American audiences. (b) The establishment of a natural cultural media structural foundation against which U.S. mass media structural conventions can be contrasted and compared. A valid, secure perspective provides a necessary definitional locus.

The Representational/Reproductive Cinema

The first perceptual/structural alternative introduced here, that of the Representational/ Reproductive Cinema, remains a significant contrast to the conventions of the Hollywood film and broadcast television programs. The forms of these conventional media are an outgrowth and elaboration of the Fictive/Transformationalist theory of film-making that was developed by the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein in the late 1920s (Eisenstein 45). The basic principles of editing (for both continuity and intellectual associations between individual shots), camera angles and lens uses, and the deliberate direction of audience attentions through manipulations of these structural elements are the key foundations described and advocated in Fictive/ Transformational theory.

Representational/Reproductive film theory, as promoted by its prime advocate Andre Bazin in the 1940s, emphasized the recording of reality with the least cinematic manipulation

possible. This customarily meant static wide angle shots of the subject that were minimally edited to retain more of the actual event-time in the film. The concern was to give the film viewer the same vantage points that might be had if they were actually present in the reality, and with a view most like normal vision (wide angle). This evidently less "creative" approach had the deliberate intent of minimizing the intellectual processing of cinematic structuring (and the required engagement of culturally-transmitted "rules" of interpretation) to engage instead the visual cognitive processing faculties of the viewer. For Bazin, the ultimate potential of film was not to direct the attention of the viewer through the manipulation of a sophisticated film structure, but through the most complete and faithful simulation of the natural senses, transport the viewer directly into the midst of an ambiguous reality(17). (This was Bazin's "myth of total cinema", an ultimate reproduction of perceptual input that today finds some level of fulfillment in the OMNIMAX cinemas, virtual environment research, and "simulator" amusement rides.)

Providing for this ambiguity is a prime conceptual point of Representational/ Reproductive theory. Rather than direct the audience *en masse* to the single "truth" as presumed by a film director, the goal is to provide an abundance of detail combined with a lack of direction so that each viewer, on their own, can find their own truth out of the matter. The relevance of this particular perspective on the ideal nature of film to Native Americans is twofold: it defines and provides theoretical support for a currently implemented technique (as in IMAX/OMNIMAX and Showscan film applications) and approach to filmmaking that can be less dependent on the culturally explicit western film/broadcast television conventions and be instead patterned after presumably neutral visual/aural sense perception, and its emphasis on viewer-discerned truths would appear to be more in harmony with the traditional storytelling methods of communication than are the explicit directives of conventional film or television (Tafoya 27).

Illustrations of Representational/Reproductive filmmaking are found in the numerous production examples of films that can be accessed for class viewing. IMAX, OMNIMAX, and Showscan format cinemas illustrate several crucial aspects of perceptual theory, such as peripheral vision and flicker rate effects, in a very striking and easily apprehended manner. The Kansas Cosmosphere and Discovery Center in Hutchinson, Kansas exhibits OMNIMAX, which displays 180 degrees of curved vision on a spherical screen, would be the closest visiting site for Haskell students. Other institutions may find several theaters within traveling distance[4].

Additionally, the films of Jacques Tati, Robert Flaherty, Jean Renoir, and Stanley Kubrick provide examples (though not always consistently) of Representational/Reproductive filming techniques. These films would serve as excellent illustrative examples.

The Study of Non-European Film and Video

Non-European films are structured according to cultural cognitive patterns dissimilar to those of the Western/European family. Of course, many foreign films have been structurally influenced by the wide availability of Hollywood films that are used as models. The Japanese director Akira Kurosawa (*The Seven Samurai*) reflects a great deal of Western influence in his

work (Bobker). However, many non-European filmmakers, working for their own home audiences, maintain a cultural integrity that sets their perceptual treatments distinctly apart from those of Hollywood film/broadcast television. Examples for class viewing could be drawn from India (Satyajit Ray in particular) and Japan. The dominant popularity of Japanese films among students at the Institute of American Indian Art in Santa Fe, New Mexico, seems to indicate a particular affinity between the Japanese film and Native American cognition (Worth and Adair 60). Inversely, Japanese director Susumi Hani remarked of Al Clah's film *Intrepid Shadows*,

> ...that Navajo film was the most beautiful film I've ever seen in America. It's too bad that you Americans cannot understand it--but the Navajo must be like the Japanese since I can understand it (61).

Experimental Film and Video

The third perceptual alternative example is experimental film and video. Although this field has a history over fifty years old and comprises many works, only those whose aspects relate to perceptual (as opposed to stylistic) investigations should be referenced.

Many of these works represent efforts by Western/European artists to adapt modes of consciousness and perception from other cultures into their own. Others are investigations into dreams and visions. In all instances, it can be argued that the artist is working to dispel the conventional perceptual stances maintained by the film and video media towards delivering "normal" images ("The Medium Viewed"). This process of "casting off" the conventional structure of mass media, so hard to effect for the culturally constrained Western/European artist, may be quite easy for other cultural groups, such as the Native American, for whom conventional media structure is not a cognitively compatible imposition. If this is the case, these cultural groups may already be predisposed towards artistic expression in film and video media, and this natural advantage should be preserved and encouraged if the individual so desires.

How natural this disposition may be has been suggested by several sources. References by Allen Ross in the Journal of American Indian Education to brain hemispheric functions in Native American modes of thinking and cognitive processing of the environment, imply a concentration in right brain employment (3). Right brain functioning is associated with symbolic logic, imagination, creativity, holistic conceptualization, and other attributes that are associated with artistic inclinations. As Jon Wade of the Institute of American Indian Art states,

> ...it has to do with addressing the learning styles of Eastern man, which Indians are--specifically, with addressing the right brain. The right brain is where creativity and spirituality and wholeness all exist ("The Institute of American Indian Art...")

Wade's reference in the above is not only to the Native American potential for creative activity, but also to the general form of educational delivery and apprehending. An inclination towards attending to information in a non-verbal, visual manner is supported in a study by George M. Guilmet, presented in Human Organization (149). These implications suggest that the

study of multicultural æsthetics in film and video must emphasize both a promotion of an artistic orientation towards film and television structure, and a reliance on visual materials and production exercises for a substantial part of any proposed course sequence of activities.

Worth and Adair's Communications Project

This proposed course design for multicultural æsthetics in film and video is highly influenced by the work of Sol Worth and John Adair in 1966. Their communications project involved providing seven Pine Springs, Arizona Navajos, who had either very limited or no contact with film or television, with film equipment and only operational training. Worth and Adair withheld all indications or guidance as to how films should be shot or edited (Worth and Adair 81). Except through implications inherent in the simple fact that a camera had a variety of lenses, or that an editing bench could cut film apart and reassemble it in a new order or length (88), there were no models for the Navajos to use in creating their cinematic structure.

The revelations provided by the unmodeled films created by the Navajos were reported by Worth and Adair in their book Through Navajo Eyes. Although there were many similarities between the films produced by the Navajos and novice counterparts in the Western/European film schools in the United States which Worth and Adair used for comparisons, there were several specific features in both the Navajo's films and in their manner of filming that revealed a uniquely Navajo visual perception and cognition of reality.

Among the many visual differences Worth and Adair noticed was an extremely heightened awareness of motion patterns, with a corresponding penchant for camera movements and experimentation with motion manipulation in editing (13). Worth and Adair were surprized by the Navajo's capacity for previsualization and retention of image details, which displayed itself prominently in their rapid and accurate editing ("We always have to have the design in our heads...it's the way the Navajo do things."(193)).

Worth and Adair believed cultural attributes were evident in the emergent Navajo structural (shot, editing, sequencing) rules. A very strong orientation towards processes was evident (84, 177), typified by the act of walking as an essential aspect of other activities (a reflection of the mythic stature of walking, and the entity-in-action).16 An avoidance of facial close-ups and other territorial observances were noted (151).

Although Worth and Adair's study has determined areas of film study that will be incorporated into the course multicultural æsthetics in film and video, at no time will these conclusions be presented as acknowledged aspects of Native American cognition, but rather they will be presented along with the other theoretical bases as possible components of an individually determined perspective on film and video application and structure.

Recommended Related Curricula and Prerequisites

Basic production courses such as Television Production and Photography I are recommended prerequisites, since media production exercises are an essential part of the course design. At the Haskell Institute, courses in American Indian Mythology, Culture, and Art would

be recommended related courses that would provide Native American perspectives within the context of the theory and cultural film/video perspectives presented in multicultural æsthetics in film and video. Similar cultural studies clusters would be recommended for other student groups. It is important that the relevance of the diversified course content be interpreted and supported by teachers who can serve as "cultural translators", as suggested by Jon Allen Reyhner in the Journal of American Indian Education (Reyhner).

Course Objectives for the Haskell Institute

Worth and Adair's preliminary reactions to the filmmaking activities of their Navajo students, as related in Through Navajo Eyes, were that the Indians were making technique and content choices that were often bizarre and incomprehensible. Visiting anthropologist Edward Hall, seeing their difficulties in rationalizing these aberrant behaviors, recommended,

> For God's sake, if it is so clear to you that they are doing it all wrong, it must be because they are breaking a set of rules which you have and which they don't. Your job will be to make explicit the different rules you and they are operating under. (Worth and Adair 110)

Hollywood film and broadcast television exhibits the cultural conventions of what Benjamin Lee Whorf called the Standard Average European (SAE). The SAE world view can be contrasted against what Terry Tafoya calls the Standard Native American (SNA) world view (30). The multicultural æsthetics course will not attempt to define a SNA perspective to be adopted by the Native Americans participating in the class. What the course will do is provide an overview of validated, well-defined and established non-SAE perspectives on film and television.

In addition to the classical theories of film described earlier, there will also be an examination of the SAE influence on the design of film and video technology: the conventions of the square picture frame, rectilinear perspective, and comparisons between imaging technologies and the biological "original" of the human organism. (A preliminary lecture and discussion session addressing the question "Why isn't television round?" would be an example of an instructional approach to this aspect of analysis. The lecturer would here present and document the various characteristics of optical and film/video display technology which have had a natural affinity towards supporting a round image format and so have been considered material obstacles to the realization of rectangular formats.) Additionally, technology design alternatives, both hypothetical and those under development, will be examined and discussed.

It is important to note here that the content of the proposed multicultural æsthetics in film and video course, although a new introduction to the Haskell curriculum, is commonly found within media theory and genre subject areas offered by a wide range of educational institutions. What is not commonly found in these institutions is the presentation of such content until after a substantial prior grounding in SAE media production methods and concepts. For the Standard Average European student, the appropriate fundamentals of film and television are those of

Hollywood film and broadcast television. Perhaps it would be only after a secure base in these appropriate approaches that the SAE student be released into the "alien" worlds of non-SAE media concepts. A fundamental premise of this course is that for a Native American student, the SAE media concept may be the alien concept, and somewhere in the non-SAE perspectives may be the appropriate Standard Native American concept. If many SAE media artists are trying to break out of a perceptual prison-house, trying to see with veiled eyes into new visions, trying to escape their own cultural perspective, the endowed cultural freedom and advantage of SNA visionaries should be retained and encouraged.

Suggested Texts and Printed Materials

Materials cited and listed in the citations should be photocopied in part and included with copied excerpts from Expanded Cinema by Gene Youngblood (New York: E.P.Dutton, 1970), Video Visions by Jonathan Price (New York: New American Library), The American Underground Film by Sheldon Renan (New York: E.P.Dutton, 1967), and selected illustrations of optical and camera designs to make a class reading packet. No text addresses the content of this course in its entirety.

Film and Videotape Rentals/Acquisitions

The following films/videotapes should be shown entire or in part in class. Other film or video viewings may be added as an outside assignment or field trip when a local theater or college program schedules a relevant example.

Artist	Film/Video	
S. Bartlett	Off/On	
J. Belson	Allures	
A. Clah	Intrepid Shadows	(other Native American films as available)
B. Conner	The 5:10 to Dreamland	
M. Deren	Meshes of the Afternoon	
S. Hagiwara	Kiri	
S. Kubrick	2001	The Shining
A. Kurosawa	Rashomon	
N. McLaren	Synchromy	Mosaic
S. Ray	Panther Panchali	
R. Steiner	H^2O	
J. Tati	Mr. Hulot Takes a Vacation	
B. Viola	Hatsu Yume	
J. Whitney	Yantra	Arabesque

Video Equipment and Production Resources

Production exercises on videotape should be carried out utilizing consumer grade camera/recorder combinations to minimize devoting attention to technical operations and allow emphasis on application. The ideal unit would be a point-and-shoot configuration similar to the Super-8 film camera. The 8mm, VHS, and Beta camcorders (approx $900 each) are excellent examples of currently available video units. Several units would be needed to permit a high volume of individual access time for performing the various class exercises. At the Haskell Institute, the Learning Resource Center would provide either a Beta format videotape system for

cuts only editing or transfer to 3/4" U-matic format for cuts only editing. However, since the Sony and Sanyo Beta camcorders are capable of back-space assemble edits, all exercises will encourage in-camera editing. The prime exploration areas of the course are not in editing technique, and this would also reduce the need for editing system access.

Summary of Objectives

One advantage of recognizing other perceptual alternatives lies in having one point of view from which another point of view can be observed. Possessing the one allows the other to be defined through comparison. As Worth and Adair pointed out, it was the contrast between their own "film world view" and that of their Navajo students that allowed them to define, for the first time in their careers, the forms of their self-assumed patterns of cognition and perception (Worth and Adair 154). If a Native American film and television student is not able to effectively work the "grammar" of SAE media structure or respond to the cultural context of SAE media content, it may be due to the lack of a fit, personally relevant basis for comparison. The course content of multicultural æsthetics in film and video should be fundamentally directed towards establishing contrasts between SAE and non-SAE rules of structure, content, and imaging.

The validation of legitimate Native American approaches to film/television programming and production will define a potential for Indian culture as both the content and the context of an orientation towards mass media. This validation will provide common ground on which individuals can unite in establishing communications services which will provide opportunities to remain within and in service to their culture and heritage.

Notes

[1] Regarding the adoption of film and television technology by Third World nations, Katz has remarked "There is a sameness in the style of television and radio presentations which has come packaged with the technology, almost as if the microphones and cameras came wrapped together with instructions for presenting a news program or variety show."(Katz) Inevitably, much of this is due to the conscious imitation of Western television models, and less directly to the dependence on Western training in production methods and organization (Katz and Wedell 114). But a most powerful determinant is the structuring of the medium itself.

[2] As McLuhan observed, the model for television and film content is theater. The context structure of theater is classical dramatic form. The image of television is rectilinear perspective as it was devised by Renaissance painters to depict three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional plane, as opposed to the curvilinear (spherical) perspective of human vision. Even the rectangular shape of the television screen is an abstract convention carried over from the proscenium of the stage and the gilded frame of the canvas. When the oral and performance forms of authentic cultures that have evolved and refined themselves outside the structural conventions of Western civilization are presented to television, many aspects of meaning can be lost or distorted.

[3] The Haskell Indian Junior College in Lawrence, Kansas is a representative example of an institution with the potential for developing a multicultural æsthetics media class. Haskell has a video production center which is currently supporting a basic video production course.

[4] There are over 60 permanent IMAX/OMNIMAX theaters, with half of these found in the United States. The Showscan system is far less well established, with some of its applications being found as a component of public entertainment "simulator rides". Niagra Falls, New York has (as of this writing) a permanent Showscan theater.

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